

POCKET PC
EXPERT

FAQ

Q Pocket Internet Explorer doesn't work with some secure online shopping sites. What are my alternatives?

A It's little surprise that PDA-based web browsers don't have all the functions of their desktop equivalents, and that's something we'll all just have to live with. However, there are a few alternatives to Pocket Internet Explorer that you can try. As with desktop browsers, you'll find that each has its own advantages, disadvantages and compatibility issues, but it's worth giving them all a free trial.

Take a look at Opera (\$24, around £12, from www.opera.com, available for Windows Mobile 5 and Pocket PC 2003/2003SE), NetFront (\$30, around £15, from www.access-company.com/products/netfrontmobile/index.html, available for Windows Mobile 5 and Pocket PC 2003/2003SE), and ThunderHawk (\$50, around £25, for a year's subscription, from www.bitsstream.com/wireless/products/pocketpc/index.html, available for all Pocket PC versions).

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Streamline your handheld

Having too many third-party programs installed on your Pocket PC can ruin its smooth-running. **Steve Clack** explains how to restore your handheld's stability

The purpose of *Pocket PC Expert* over the past few years has been to help users squeeze the very most from their handhelds, to go beyond using it as a simple Filofax replacement and explore new things that a traditional paper organiser simply isn't capable of. We've covered a lot of add-on software in the process, including enhanced third-party replacements for virtually every one of the built-in applications.

You can spend a small fortune on software for your PDA, and in doing so you'll hopefully boost your productivity. But it's as easy to spend just as much time trying out new applications and tweaking your device. The net result can be that you're in danger of losing most of the real benefit of owning a PDA, at least in terms of the time it's supposed to save you. Filofax users will argue that their paper alternative requires no configuration, updating or day-to-day management, not to mention the far lower cost.

GETTING CRASH-PROOFED

Although it's worthwhile investigating any potentially beneficial third-party software, there's a lot to be said for making the most of the software that's built into your handheld. As with any operating system, every piece of software you add brings with it an increased chance of incompatibilities and crashes. If you find that your Pocket PC is resetting itself with painful regularity, the chances are that a reduction in the number of third-party applications, Today screen plug-ins and system utilities will alleviate the situation.

Many users who use only a handful of third-party applications experience very few resets and enjoy an altogether more stable operating platform. Low-level system 'hacks', such as interface enhancements, tend to be the worst offenders, but some Today screen plug-ins can also give you trouble.

If you're really suffering with instability issues, you could try performing a complete backup and then running the system for at least a few days with no add-on software installed, just to check you don't have an underlying hardware problem that's causing the instability. Once you've gone through this step, re-install all your add-on software from scratch, starting with the items you feel you really can't live without, and leaving all the low-level system utilities until last.

It can be a lengthy process, but if you're prepared to run your handheld for a day or two between each installation of new software, the chances are that you'll spot the point at which your stability starts to go awry, and you can work backwards from there. If you have a few items that you suspect are culprits, you may be able to save time by doing a Google search. Include the name of the software and the words 'compatibility problem', 'crash' and so on, but without the quote marks. If you're having problems there's a good chance that other users are, too, and somebody else might have posted a solution that could save you hours of time trying to track down the source of the trouble.

As a general note, it's important not to confuse software applications with user data when it comes to

Save the date Repeating appointments

If you have appointments or Task items that repeat on a regular basis, it's easy enough to go into Edit mode each time the event occurs and re-edit it to the new date, but there's an even better way that's simple to set up. By tapping on the Occurs line in Edit mode, just below the time and date fields, you get a drop-down menu that lets you instantly set the current event to repeat every week on the same day, or on the same day every month (which obviously doesn't work properly for anything beyond the 28th of the month), or annually on the currently selected day of the year.

There's also a set of far more powerful criteria you can apply by tapping on the ominous-looking Edit Pattern menu option. This takes you to a wizard-like set of setup screens from which you get fine control over every aspect of your repeating event. From here, you can set up virtually any repeat interval, no matter how complex: the last Friday of every month, the 17th of the month at quarterly intervals, every third Saturday, every 22 days and so on. You also get the option to end the cycle on a particular date, or even after a set number of occurrences.



▲ You can set up repeating events easily using the Occurs option

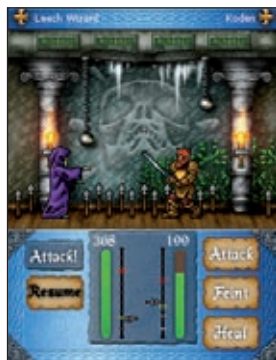
Once you've saved the event, every time you go back into Edit mode you'll be given the choice of either editing the currently opened occurrence of the event, or making changes to the whole repeating series.

PDAMILL GAME STUDIOS Arvale Short Tales

★★★★★

\$20 (around £10)

Billed as a light role-playing game, Arvale Short Tales is the third in the Arvale series. The game comprises three short, self-contained adventures. This kind of game normally has you exploring a gigantic fantasy world over dozens of hours, which translates into weeks if not months of play. So if you're a little too impatient to go for the usual, full-blown



▲ Each Arvale adventure gives around 10-20 hours of gameplay

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to learn; engaging gameplay
- ✓ Excellent cartoon-like graphics
- ✗ Not for those who enjoy long games

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fantasy adventure, Arvale Short Tales is the perfect alternative.

When you add to that the delightful cartoon-like graphics, decent storyline, engaging combat and a simple, step-by-step tutorial, you get the ideal role-playing game for anyone who isn't sure if the genre is right for them.

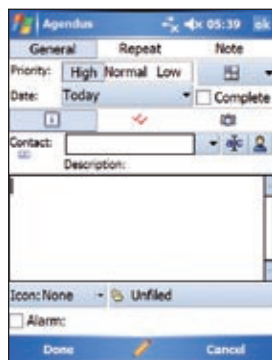
IAMBIC Agendus Professional

★★★★★

\$25 (around £13)

The built-in Pocket PC Calendar, Contacts and Tasks are simply too lightweight for all but the most basic of users, and the need for something more powerful is well served by Pocket Informant (\$25, around £13, from www.pocketinformant.com) and Agenda Fusion (\$30, around £15, from www.developerone.com). The two programs have been jostling for position as the top choice for some years now, and both are mature and full of features.

So why would Iambic Software, authors of the top Palm OS equivalent, venture into the Pocket PC world with a competing product? Although it offers nowhere near as many views on your data, its authors have gone to a lot of



▲ Agendus Professional's interface has a crisp, clean look

effort to give it a crisp, clean interface that is more elegant and easier to fathom. Data-entry screens all appear uncluttered and logically laid out, and the Preferences settings are much less daunting than the mass of options you'll find in Pocket Informant and Agenda Fusion.

If you've recently switched from a Palm handheld that was running Agendus, you'll find most aspects of the Pocket PC version reassuringly familiar, though this first version lacks many of the more advanced features of the current Palm version. If you're just looking for something that's more powerful than the built-in software – and far better-looking – but with a modest learning curve, Agendus is a good choice.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Not as many features as its rivals
- ✗ Works with Windows Mobile 5 only

SUPPLIER www.iambic.com

troubleshooting. Having hundreds or thousands of Pocket Word (Word Mobile) documents, voice notes or to-do items on your handheld isn't likely to cause any stability problems. It's running applications that are the source of the trouble, and more often the system utilities that are running constantly in the background, as described above.

FAST AND FURIOUS

Overall speed is also affected by the number of programs you have running on your handheld, and again you'll probably see a noticeable difference if you perform the backup-and-restore regime above. This is one area where the number of data files can have an impact, at least when

going into Open and Save dialogs and browsing long lists of files. As with any computer system, it makes sense to organise your files so that you don't have huge numbers in a single folder. Simply create subfolders within My Documents (or elsewhere) and move some of your files into those.

FLEXIBLE SOFTWARE

If you're planning to keep add-on software to a minimum, you'll need to think about how you use the built-in applications. You can use Pocket Word (Word Mobile) or Notes for almost anything that requires text input. Keep a single Pocket Word or Notes file for use as your day-to-day scratchpad of general scribbles and

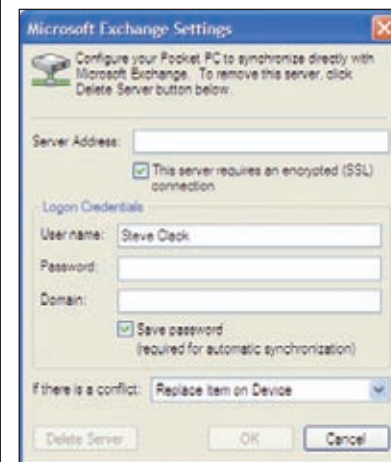
Tune to wireless Syncing without wires

Although ActiveSync's ability to synchronise wirelessly with a local PC was removed from version 4 for security reasons, it's still possible to do it via a Microsoft Exchange Server.

If your company uses Exchange Server, you need to find out the server name, username, password and domain, then connect the handheld to your computer. When the device has finished its normal synchronisation, click on the Tools menu in the ActiveSync status window, and then on Add Server Source. From there, enter the Exchange Server name into the Server Address field. Go down to Login Credentials and add your username, password and domain details. Then select Save Password to retain the settings you've entered.

Finally, choose the preferred conflict-resolution method, so that if information has been changed on both the server and your handheld the remote server will know which version of the data it should keep.

If you're running a version of ActiveSync prior to 4.0, you need to access the above settings by clicking on Options on the Tools menu in the ActiveSync window. Then select Enable synchronization with a server, at the bottom of the Sync Options tab. Next, click on the Configure button beside it. In the Server Options window that pops up, click on the Connections button.



▲ Synchronise your Pocket PC with Microsoft Exchange Server

ideas, or jot down everything as individual Tasks. Pocket Word's bulleted list feature is particularly handy for taking meeting minutes or jotting down a tidily formatted shopping list. Pocket Excel (Excel Mobile) is also a good place to keep almost any kind of list, and you've always got instant access on your PC via ActiveSync, as well as the ability to create a quick printout.

If you're running Windows Mobile 5, one piece of software you'll be unable to manage without is a secure storage program for your bank details, web logins and passwords. Earlier Pocket PC versions allowed you to store this kind of information in password-protected Pocket Word files, but that feature was removed from Windows Mobile 5. ☹